

Executive Summary

Abstract of Study

The National Advisory Council for Environmental Policy and Technology (NACEPT) was established in 1988 to provide advice to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on issues related to environmental management and policy. NACEPT provides a forum for public discussion and the development of independent advice and counsel by taking advantage of the respective experiences, strengths, knowledge, and responsibilities of a broad range of Agency constituents and stakeholders. Since 1988, the Council has convened and directed the work of 26 standing committees, each established to address a specific issue. Over the last decade, these standing committees, comprised of over 700 stakeholder representatives, have addressed Agency issues related to information management, program activities, and general management and policy. The Council, in turn, has approved and published over 50 major reports containing over 1,000 recommendations to the EPA Administrator. In recognition of the 10-year anniversary of NACEPT, the Council undertook a study to evaluate its past performance and to chart a course for its future by identifying ways to better serve the Agency.

This study found that NACEPT has undoubtedly been a success. NACEPT's standing committees have produced hundreds of timely and relevant recommendations to requests by the EPA Administrator. Many of these recommendations have influenced or been directly responsible for subsequent EPA decisions and actions. In addition, the volume and range of topics addressed by NACEPT has increased during this time, reflecting the value placed on the Council by EPA's leadership.

This report, entitled *NACEPT: Past and Future*, presents the results of this study. Other key finding of the study are:

- ▶ NACEPT recommendations have had significant impacts on Agency decision-making as demonstrated by the creation of new programs such as the U.S. Environmental Training Institute, the establishment of new Agency offices such as the Technology Innovation Office, and incorporation into formal Agency policy such as the EPA's IRM Strategic Plan.
- ▶ NACEPT's recommendations have fulfilled the requests for advice made to Council by the EPA Administrator.
- ▶ Membership on NACEPT is balanced and representative of diverse points of view. Feedback to standing committees on the impact of their recommendations and their implementation has been limited.
- ▶ Standing committees have adequate direction, support, and resources to complete their work although enhancements in communication and facilitation support are desirable.

Based on these findings, NACEPT has undertaken several strategic planning initiatives including the development of a strategic action plan, which identified future and emerging issues relevant to environmental decision-making. In addition, this report includes recommendations related to NACEPT's operations, its standing committees, and EPA's Office of Cooperative Environmental Management, which provides management and administrative support to the Council. These recommendations range from implementing a structured evaluation of each standing committee on completion of its work to requesting a formal response from the Agency to all standing committee reports. The full list of study findings and recommendations is presented in the following Exhibits ES-1 and ES-2.

Exhibit ES-1.

PRINCIPAL FINDINGS

1. NACEPT provides valuable input and advice to the Agency from a wide variety of stakeholders.
2. Recommendations are timely for Agency decision-making and fulfill standing committee charters.
3. Standing committee membership is a balanced representation of points of view.
4. Standing committees are given adequate direction to fulfill their missions; early agreement on purpose and goals may help to improve efficiency.
5. Standing committee recommendations are developed in a timely, inclusive fashion.
6. Most respondents have not received feedback from the Agency on the impact of their standing committee's recommendations.
7. Communication between standing committee members is adequate but improvements are needed for communications between meetings and to the Council.
8. Standing committee meetings are generally well-planned and structured yet improvements can be made in defining the consensus process, ensuring equitable participation, and keeping decisions on track.
9. Standing committee members were generally positive about receiving timely and useful background and technical materials to make informed decisions.
10. More frequent meetings and improved communication between meetings could improve standing committee effectiveness.
11. Better meeting support can be achieved through increased use of technology and facilitation.

Exhibit ES-2.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The NACEPT Council should:

- Do more strategic planning to identify the policy issues which NACEPT standing committees address.
- Better publicize itself and its work to all parts of the Agency and beyond.
- Streamline the process of developing and delivering recommendations.
- Conduct an evaluation of standing committee processes upon the completion of the standing committee's work.
- Take responsibility for maintaining contact with its past members.

NACEPT Standing Committees should:

- Prioritize their recommendations and include suggested schedules and performance targets for implementation of each recommendation.
- Request a formal response from the Agency to all standing committee reports at an appropriate interval.

The Office of Cooperative Environmental Management should:

- Ensure productive interaction directly between NACEPT standing committees and relevant Agency program offices.
- Ensure that standing committee work is adequately planned and managed by the Designated Federal Officer (DFO) and standing committee chairperson to achieve committee goals in an efficient manner.
- Make clear to the program offices the qualifications needed to be a DFO and provide training to appointed DFOs.
- Develop better ways for NACEPT members to communicate between meetings.
- Establish an enhanced formal method for the establishment of standing committees.
- Improve the NACEPT and standing committee orientation process for new members.
- Develop a formal facilitation program to ensure proper support for each standing committee.

Summary of Report

Overview of NACEPT

In 1988, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) founded the National Advisory Council for Environmental Policy and Technology (NACEPT) [previously known as the National Advisory Council for Environmental Technology Transfer (NACETT)]. NACEPT was established to provide an ongoing stakeholder advisory group to recommend ways the Agency could encourage technology transfer through cooperative activities with industry, academia, and non-federal government agencies.

In its first decade of operation, NACEPT has involved over 700 stakeholder representatives from a variety of sectors including business and industry, state, local, and tribal governments, and academia, who have participated in 26 standing committees in addition to the Council. Each standing committee is established to address a specific charge within a set timeframe. As such, the Council serves as a steering committee, reviewing and approving the reports and recommendations of the standing committees.

The number of NACEPT standing committee investigations has increased over the past decade as NACEPT has increased the scope of issues on which it provides the Agency advice, as shown in the Exhibit ES-3 below. These committees, identified in Exhibit ES-4, have held hundreds of open meetings in accordance with the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA), produced over 50 major, published reports, and put forth over 1,000 recommendations related to information management, program activities, and general Agency policies.

Exhibit ES-3. Number of Standing Committees by Topic Area

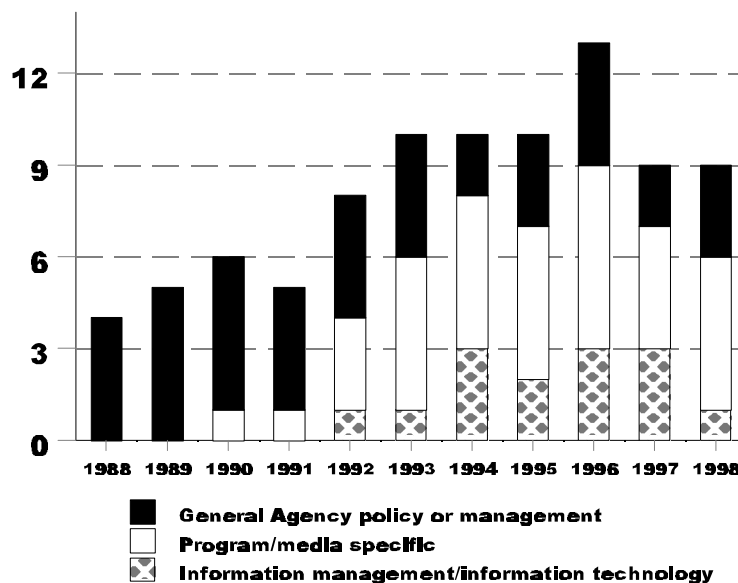
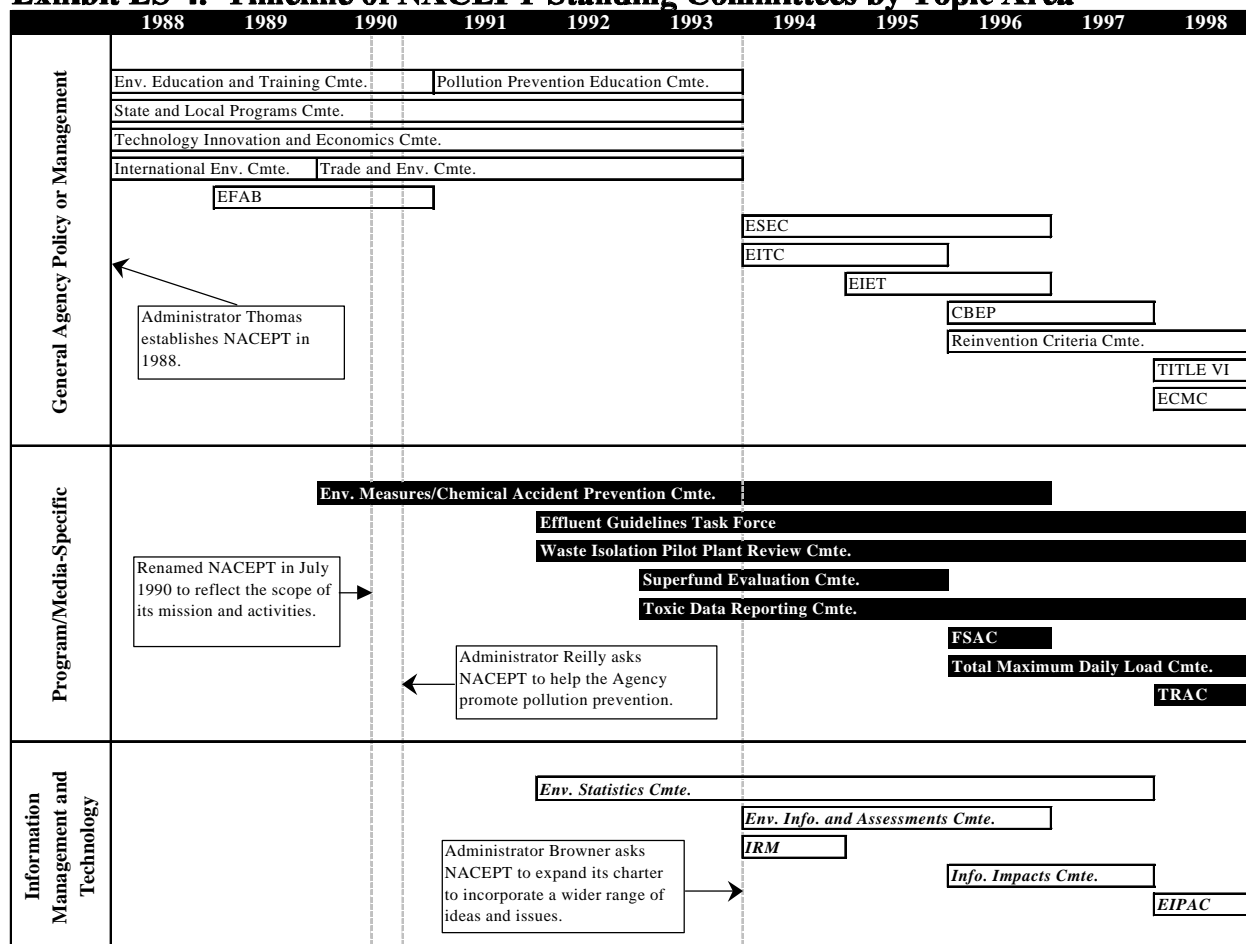


Exhibit ES-4. Timeline of NACEPT Standing Committees by Topic Area



Note: Appendix A: NACEPT Standing Committee Acronyms presents the full name and dates of operation for each committee.

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study was to assess NACEPT's effectiveness and impact over its first decade of operations and to develop recommendations to enhance its value in the future. The study examined NACEPT organizational processes, products, and impacts to assess both the efficiency and effectiveness of NACEPT and its standing committees from the perspectives of those serving on the Council and EPA officials who are the Council's clients. The study also examined the interaction between the Council and its standing committees and between the Council and EPA, especially the Office of Cooperative Environmental Management (OCEM) which supports the Council on behalf of the Administrator.

The study was conducted in three stages of data collection, involving: (1) extensive review of NACEPT and OCEM records and external data sources; (2) a written survey targeting all past

and current NACEPT members; and (3) detailed one-on-one interviews with a selected sample of NACEPT members and EPA officials. Additional details on the study methodology are included Appendices F, G, H, I, K, and L.

Principal Findings

Several tests of effectiveness were used in this study to assess NACEPT's impact, including the extent to which the Council and its standing committees had:

- ▶ fulfilled their charges;
- ▶ brought new, outside perspectives to EPA;
- ▶ provided timely and relevant advice and recommendations; and
- ▶ influenced the outcome of Agency policy decisions and/or course of program activities.

By all of these standards, NACEPT has been a success. Principal findings of the study are summarized in Exhibit ES-1 on page ES-2.

Through its standing committees, NACEPT has produced over 1,000 recommendations presented in over 50 major reports. In addition to informal advice, counsel, and insight were provided directly to EPA officials in the course of NACEPT meetings. Both NACEPT members and Agency officials interviewed attest to the new perspectives that NACEPT has brought to issues put before it and to the quality and timeliness of its recommendations on these issues. By a significant margin, past and current NACEPT members valued their service on NACEPT and rated their standing committee's work as valuable to EPA. For example,

- ▶ Survey respondents were very positive about the value of the NACEPT process and the advice NACEPT provides EPA decision-makers.
- ▶ Respondents particularly value the diversity of perspectives captured within the NACEPT process.
- ▶ Over three-quarters of respondents indicated that they would serve on NACEPT again if asked.¹

Agency officials echoed these views and, as shown in Exhibit ES-5, there is an extensive list of Agency decisions and actions that can be traced back to recommendations made by NACEPT. This list, which is only a partial list of NACEPT's impact, indicates the considerable influence of NACEPT on Agency policies and actions over the last decade.

¹ NACEPT members volunteer their expertise and time and are not compensated although travel costs are reimbursed.

Exhibit ES-5. Impacts of NACEPT by Topic Area

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND TECHNOLOGY	
<i>Standing Committees</i>	<i>Impacts on EPA Policy</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Environmental Information and Assessments Committee ◆ Environmental Statistics Committee ◆ Information Resources Management Strategic Planning Task Force ◆ Environmental Information and Public Access Committee ◆ Information Impacts Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ OIRM management incorporated NACEPT recommendation into the Agency's Strategic Management Plan. ◆ EPA launched the Facility Identification Initiative to streamline access and reporting by establishing a uniform set of facility identification data. ◆ EPA's IRM Strategic Plan incorporated much of the language contained in the IRM Task Force recommendations. ◆ Consistent with NACEPT advice, the Agency has created a Chief Information Officer to oversee the Agency's information management. ◆ Advice of the Information Impacts Committee was cited in a June 1998 Agency audit of the Office of Water's Data Integration Efforts. ◆ Recommendations of the Environmental Information and Assessment Committee influenced the Agency's Office of Research and Development's management strategy for scientific data. ◆ EPA established a Center for Environmental Information and Statistics as recommended by the Environmental Statistics Committee.
PROGRAM/MEDIA SPECIFIC POLICY	
<i>Standing Committees</i>	<i>Impacts on EPA Policy</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Environmental Measures/Chemical Accident Prevention Committee ◆ Superfund Evaluation Committee ◆ Food Safety Advisory Committee ◆ Total Maximum Daily Load Committee ◆ Effluent Guidelines Task Force ◆ Waste Isolation Pilot Plant Review Committee ◆ Toxic Data Reporting Committee ◆ Tolerance Reassessment Advisory Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The advice of EMCAP has been used in the measurement process in the Agency's pollution prevention program. ◆ EPA's Superfund Administrative Reforms adopted many of the concepts embodied in the SEC's recommendations. ◆ The Integrative Environmental Justice Model Demonstration Approach developed by SEC was incorporated into the <u>OSWER Environmental Justice Action Agenda</u> developed by the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council (NEJAC). ◆ EGTF recommendations have led to limitations on the use of synthetic-based drilling fluids, an examination of rules addressing coal mining operations, and revisions to the feedlot category as well as a commitment from the Agency to write regulations for dams. ◆ EPA now recommends that states publish their methodology for TMDL listings and establish related data quality assurance measures. ◆ The Agency has incorporated earlier stakeholder participation in the development of specific Effluent Guideline Rules. ◆ EPA has used approaches developed by FSAC to make FQPA regulatory decisions. ◆ EPA is currently utilizing the framework developed by TRAC to investigate science policy areas related to FQPA and tolerance reassessment.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Input from the TDR committee has led to revisions to Form A reporting requirements and resulting procedures. ◆ NACEPT advice was incorporated into the Agency's compliance criteria for WIPP. ◆ EPA now recommends the establishment of community groups to increase public involvement in the remediation of radiation contaminated sites.
GENERAL AGENCY/ POLICY/MANAGEMENT	
<i>Standing Committees</i>	<i>Impacts on EPA Policy</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Environmental Education and Training Committee ◆ Pollution Prevention Education Committee ◆ State and Local Programs Committee ◆ Technology Innovation and Economics Committee ◆ Trade and Environment Committee ◆ International Environmental Committee ◆ Environmental Financial Advisory Board ◆ Ecosystems Sustainable Economies Committee ◆ Ecosystems Implementation Tools Committee ◆ Environmental Information, Economics, and Technology ◆ Community Based Environmental Protection Committee ◆ Reinvention Criteria Committee ◆ Environmental Capital Markets Committee ◆ Title VI Implementation Advisory Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ EPA developed of a guidebook to help develop more sustainable economic systems. ◆ EPA created of a new U.S. Environmental Training Institute. ◆ EPA formed of EPA's Office of Environmental Education. ◆ EPA created of non-profit organizations addressing environmental education and needs of industry. ◆ EPA improved delivery of environmental information to college students and young adults. ◆ EPA established of a Technology Innovation Office (TIO) to facilitate the transfer of technologies developed in the Superfund Innovative Technology Evaluation program. ◆ EPA has addressed "environmental education" in a proactive manner. ◆ EPA developed programs which focus on educating businesses on how to implement environmental programs. ◆ EPA developed Enviro\$en\$e, an electronic library of information on pollution prevention, technical assistance, and environmental compliance. ◆ The Agency has supported of projects to build state and local capacity for risk-based planning. ◆ EPA established of a the Clean Air Act Advisory Committee by the Office of Air and Radiation. ◆ EPA implemented of comparative risk and strategic planning in EPA Regions. ◆ EPA increased cooperative agreements. ◆ EPA increased use of performance evaluation based on outcomes. ◆ EPA conducted pre-congressional consultations on the Agency's GPRA plan. ◆ EPA incorporated technology incentives into the Agency's pollution prevention strategy. ◆ EPA developed techniques for ecosystem valuation. ◆ EPA developed final guidance for implementation of the data elements required by the Pollution Prevention Act.

At the same time, although largely satisfied with the process, many past and current NACEPT members recommended improvements in certain aspects of NACEPT and standing committee operations. Most importantly, few NACEPT members indicated knowing what EPA had done with their standing committee's recommendations, which impedes the Council's ability to provide continuing advice and counsel on that topic. Nearly one-quarter (24%) of respondents did not know whether the Agency had taken actions as a result of the standing committee's advice. The other principal findings are as follows:

- ▶ While adequate direction is given to guide the work of a standing committee, an initial agreement between the standing committee and relevant Agency offices on the specific purpose and goals of the standing committee would improve efficiency of the standing committee's work.
- ▶ Standing committees would benefit from more support (e.g., background materials) on technical issues. In addition, in the case of a few standing committees, respondents stated that agendas and meeting materials were not distributed in a timely way.
- ▶ The efficiency of standing committee work could be improved by more frequent meetings of the committee and improved communication between meetings to allow the committee to advance its work between meetings.
- ▶ Better meeting management is often needed. Specifically, clear and agreed on processes for reaching consensus need to be identified, equitable participation must be ensured, and facilitation is needed to keep discussions on-track.
- ▶ Deliberations could be improved by having technical advisors on hand at all meetings as well as better clerical support and equipment for real-time collaborative group work (e.g., laptop computers to draft recommendations).
- ▶ While communication is effective between standing committee members, communication between the Council and standing committees is limited.

Recommendations

Based on the findings summarized above and described in greater detail in the remainder of this report, recommendations were developed in three areas related to: (1) Council operations; (2) standing committee activities; and (3) OCEM support. These recommendations are presented in Exhibit ES-2 on page ES-3 and described briefly below.

Recommendations for improving the NACEPT Council

- ▶ NACEPT should engage in a strategic planning effort to identify pressing or emerging policy issues which standing committees might address. The results of these efforts should be

transmitted to the EPA Administrator on an annual basis.

- ▶ NACEPT should streamline the recommendation review process to ensure that the advice of standing committees is approved by the Council and transmitted to the Agency in a timely fashion.
- ▶ NACEPT should conduct post-committee evaluations. Such evaluations would be led by the standing committee chairperson and DFO and would attempt to identify which aspects of the process worked well and where improvement or change is needed.
- ▶ NACEPT should better publicize itself and its work to all parts of the Agency and to external audiences.
- ▶ NACEPT should make a concerted effort to maintain contact with its past members. This contact should include communication regarding the actions which have been taken by the Agency as the result of NACEPT's advice.
- ▶ For cases in which the Agency has committed to implement NACEPT recommendations, NACEPT should request formal updates on the status of implementation of those recommendations.

Recommendations for improving the NACEPT Standing Committees

- ▶ Standing committees should be encouraged to prioritize their recommendations and include, where appropriate, implementation schedules and milestones for each recommendation.
- ▶ Standing committees should request that the Agency provide a formal response to NACEPT on the Agency's disposition toward standing committee recommendations at a mutually acceptable interval. (For most standing committees, the schedule of 60 days after transmittal seems reasonable.)

Recommendations for OCEM's management of NACEPT

- ▶ OCEM should maximize direct interaction between standing committees and Agency program offices. This could be accomplished by establishing a program office-standing committee liaison. Such a liaison would be encouraged to attend standing committee meetings, contribute to the development of agendas and background materials, and serve as the key intermediary on technical issues.
- ▶ OCEM should ensure that standing committee work is adequately planned and managed by the Designated Federal Official (DFO) and chairperson to achieve the standing committee goals in an efficient manner. Such planning would include the initial development of clear objectives and timelines to guide the investigation, as well as milestones and performance objectives by which to assess progress.
- ▶ OCEM should develop and implement a formal facilitation program to ensure

proper support for each standing committee.

- ▶ OCEM should develop better ways for standing committee members to communicate between meetings. Options provided by the Internet and telecommunication systems should be considered.
- ▶ OCEM should review and enhance the method by which new standing committees are established. Specifically, better definition of the purpose and a more rigorous membership selection process are needed.
- ▶ OCEM should improve the orientation process for new members. Improvements could include enhanced focus on past NACEPT work to provide committee-specific background, as well as the development of new ways to provide training on FACA guidelines such as online tutorials or a brief video.

Conclusion

Over its first decade, NACEPT has addressed an extensive and varied set of issues at the request of the EPA Administrator and provided valuable recommendations, advice, and counsel on these issues and topics. Equally important, NACEPT's recommendations have had a significant and lasting impact on the Agency's decision making, policies, and program activities. These impacts attest to the value of the expertise and perspectives that NACEPT is able to bring to an issue. In addition, the usefulness of NACEPT to the Agency is demonstrated by the number of standing committees and range of issues addressed by NACEPT at the Administrator's request in the last decade.

NACEPT has demonstrated that it is EPA's most unique federal advisory committee. This study has identified NACEPT as having developed a niche for providing valuable advice on broad, cross-media issues. At the same time, NACEPT has displayed the flexibility to address specific programmatic issues that are of a high priority or urgent in nature. This flexibility has enabled NACEPT to be responsive to EPA, even as issues and priorities change.

At present, NACEPT is taking the strategic initiative to reinvent itself, thereby increasing its value to EPA. Evidence of this includes this study, the creation of the NACEPT Council's strategic plan, customer focus and partnering, and improved processes. NACEPT's future is filled with possibilities and promise, based on the past 10 years' exemplary record of service to EPA and the citizens of the United States.

NACEPT is indebted to Nancy Tosta, Gerard Bulanowski, Bill Sonntag, Tom Davis, and Patricia Bauman who, as the members of the Study team, directed this study and developed its findings and recommendations. Their insights, efforts, and enthusiasm were instrumental to the success of this study.